

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15
CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 DODE-00 ACDA-07 /064 W
-----065587 251341Z /47

R 251103Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0274
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

S E C R E T GABORONE 1645

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS BC UK
SUBJECT: SECURITY ASSISTANCE FOR BOTSWANA

REF: GABORONE 1558

1. UK HIGH COMMISSIONER TURNR ON JULY 22 OUTLINED ADDITIONAL DETAILS OF UK ASSISTANCE TO BOTSWANA DEFENSE FORCE IN THE FORM OF TRAINING AND ORGANIZATION. HE REITERATED SATISFACTION (REFTEL) AT "FINALLY GETTING FIRM ORAL REQUEST OUT OF THE GOB". THIS COMMENT IS CONSISTENT WITH HICOM TURNER'S EARLIER INDICATION THAT EXPERTS ARE COMING AT THE INITIATIVE OF THE UK. (THE CLEAR IMPRESSION, HOWEVER UNINTENDED, CREATED BY THE HICOM IS THAT OF RELUCTANCE ON THE PART OF THE GOB.)

2. TURNER WAS SURE THAT THE REQUEST, ALTHOUGH ONLY ORAL, WAS FIRM SAYING THAT ONLY CABINET APPROVAL (WHICH HE CONSIDERED PRO FORMA) WAS REQUIRED. HE STRESSED AGAIN THE DELICACY OF THIS MATTER BY NOTING THAT NOTHING IS BEING PUT IN WRITING, CLEARLY OUT OF CONCERN THAT BLACK AFRICAN OPINION WOULD BE HIGHLY ADVERSE.

3. UK TRAINING AND ORGANIZATIONAL ASSISTANCE WILL BE CARRIED OUT BY A TWO-MAN TEAM EXPECTED TO ARRIVE MID-AUGUST AND STAY SEVERAL WEEKS. TEAM WILL CONSIST OF A
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BRIGADIER AND A MAJOR. ACCORDING TO HICOM TURNER, THEY WILL HAVE A MANDATE TO "ASSESS THE THREAT TO BOTSWANA" WHICH MEANS THEY WILL BE ALLOWED TO TRAVEL THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, VISIT BORDER AREAS WITH RHODESIA, INSPECT BDF CAMPS, ETC. THEY WILL ALSO BE EXPECTED, AT CONCLUSION OF THEIR SURVEY, TO RECOMMEND PROGRAM OF ARMS ACQUISITION TO MEET BOTSWANA'S URGENT NEEDS.

4. TURNER SUGGESTED, AND I AGREED, THAT WE SHOULD DO EVERYTHING WE COULD THROUGH INFORMAL CONTACTS WITH KEY GOB OFFICIALS TO ENCOURAGE GOB TO AWAIT THE UK TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS ON ARMS REQUIREMENTS. HIS GREAT CONCERN IS THAT, AS A RESULT OF OPPOSITION PARTY PRESSURES AND THE SENSE OF HELPLESSNESS IN FACE OF RHODESIAN INCURSIONS, GOB WILL OUT OF DESPERATION AGREE TO TAKE SOVIET ARMS AND EQUIPMENT AND THEREBY ACQUIRE AN ARSENAL UNRELATED TO BOTSWANA'S TRUE NEEDS. HE IS ALSO CONCERNED AT WASTE AS WELL AS INABILITY TO CONTROL WEAPONS THAT MIGHT THEREFORE FALL INTO THE HANDS OF IRRESPONSIBLE PERSONS.

5. TURNER EXPRESSES GREAT SENSE OF RELIEF THAT GOB HAS AGREED TO THE EXPERTS' MISSION; HE FEELS WE HAVE BORROWED TIME TO PERMIT THE BDF TO DEVELOP IN A LOGICAL, ORDERLY WAY. OTHER FAVORABLE SIGNS IN HIS OPINION ARE: A) GOB ACQUISITION OF THREE DEFENDER AIRCRAFT (UK-MADE BUT WITH US ENGINES, HE SAID) (GABORONE 1514); AND B) GOB ORDER FOR A HALF-DOZEN LIGHT TROOP CARRIERS CONSTRUCTED ON LAND ROVER CHASSIS. HE IS ENCOURAGED BY THE APPARENTLY CAREFUL FLIGHT TRAINING PROGRAM FOR TEN BOTSWANA NOW IN PROGRESS AND BELIEVES THIS PROGRAM IS IN LINE WITH BOTSWANA'S NEEDS AND CAPACITIES.

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6. COMMENT: THE GOB REQUEST FOR UK EXPERTISE IN TRAINING AN ORGANIZATION OF BDF IS A HOPEFUL SIGNAL OF ITS DESIRE TO RELY ON THE WEST FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE. ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT GOB CONTINUES TO LOOK TO U.S. AS A SOURCE OF ARMS (ALTHOUGH RECONCILED TO PURCHASE RATHER THAN GRANT). GENERAL MERAFHE TOLD ME JULY 24 THAT OFFERS OF ARMS FROM USSR HAVE BEEN REITERATED RECENTLY AND THAT THERE IS SENTIMENT IN GOB IN FAVOR OF ACCEPTING THEM RATHER THAN AWAITING OUTCOME OF UK EXPERT SURVEY AND US DECISION ON SELLING THEM. HE REFERRED TO NEW CAMPAIGN BY OPPOSITION BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT PARTY IN FAVOR OF BOTSWANA'S "DISENGAGEMENT" FROM SOUTH AFRICA AND ACCEPTANCE OF SOVIET AND CUBAN ARMS. IN RESPONSE TO MY OBSERVATION ABOUT DELICACY OF U.S. ASSUMING AN ARMS SUPPLIER ROLE TO A FRONT LINE STATE, GENERAL MERAFHE ASKED WHAT BOTSWANA WAS SUPPOSED TO DO WHEN THE "OTHER SIDE" IS ARMING RIVAL NATIONALIST FACTIONS WHICH REPRESENT A "CLEAR THREAT" TO BOTSWANA'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. IN BRIEF, WHILE UK TEAM MAY GIVE US SOME BREATHING ROOM, NOTHING HAS OCCURRED, OR IS LIKELY TO OCCUR, THAT WILL MAKE EASIER OUR RESPONSE TO BOTSWANA'S REQUEST FOR ARMS ASSISTANCE IN MAINTAINING ITS TERRITORIAL

INTEGRITY.

NORLAND

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SECURITY, MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
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Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977GABORO01645
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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From: GABORONE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 GABORONE 1558
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1762945
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SECURITY ASSISTANCE FOR BOTSWANA
TAGS: PINS, BC, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/63d38264-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009